Boston, 1953

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Boston, 1953

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Summary

"I don't think he has no plan, I think he's just..." Hannibal makes a faintly frustrated noise. "He's going somewhere with it. Someplace I can't quite follow yet."

The smile Will offers is gentle, a placating thing. His partner is weary, he's allowing the guilt for not saving so many to eat away at him. It's been more work for Will to keep him above water than to cover up. One pastime merged into another so quickly and effortlessly he forgot when it happened.

A serial killer plagues Boston, with no real motive, no connection between the victims, and no one interested except Detective Hannibal Lecter and his partner, who is more intimately involved with the case than Hannibal realizes.

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There is never just one lifetime, not for people who are meant to meet. In Will Graham and Hannibal Lecter's case, they shared five. Four which they could not share fully, and one which they did. This is their fourth.

Notes

This is the fourth in a 5-part AU series depicting the lifetimes Hannibal and Will had shared but never fully lived through, and one that they're still working on (canon). We will post every Sunday for the next six weeks.

This has been an ongoing project for a few months and we are very proud of it. Some of the lifetimes connect more than others, there are mentions and clues connecting to previous 'lives' or past ones and they do flow into one another, as slowly but surely they get closer and closer to this lifetime they share now.

They will be rated per story, some ranging to explicit for violence, while others for sex. We're just gonna assume that language isn't a factor ;)

Chapter 1

“This one is really bothering you,” Will murmurs, the smirk on his face is unmistakeable, an unspoken proposal to make that bother go away with a distraction, but, as always, he does nothing more than not-offer. He swirls the dregs of his coffee in the cheap diner mug before swallowing it down. He rests his fingers in a steeple over the empty mug and cocks his head at his partner.

“We’ve seen worse than this, what’s got you so riled?”

The detective is miles away at the first statement, with his chin propped up on his palm, fingers folded back against his mouth and to one side, eyes gone distant as he surveys the inside of the diner. At nearing four a.m., there's little to look at, even here in the city. The dirty streets outside are empty, the tables around them an assortment of night shifters going home, and early workers going out. They're in between.

"It's going to get worse," Hannibal answers at length, and his eyes absently trace the motion of a waitress, though he has no interest in her short skirt and pristine white apron ending well above her knees. Will has never seen him consider anyone else the way he looked at Will when his eyes come back into focus, when Detective Lecter picks up on the undertone of the first statement in retrospect. Except maybe Marlon Brando on the movie screen but that was hardly worth jealousy.

"It's just that there's something almost familiar about them," He answers fully, and then gives his face a scrub and grabs for his coffee. "I don't know. My apologies, Will. I feel like it's eating me alive sometimes."

Will’s lips purse in a strange smile and he lets his eyes take in the man in front of him; exhausted, carrying more of the world on his shoulders than he deserved. They had been partners for years now, despite the age difference and experience that brought forward. Hannibal’s previous partner had been killed – friendly fire – and Will had graduated at the right time. They had a good record, but this case was taking longer than expected. Lucky number thirteen.

“Familiar how?” he asks, licking his lips briefly before motioning for the waitress to refill his mug. It was that ungodly hour where if he avoided coffee he would collapse, and if he drank it he wouldn’t get the rest the bureau would allow. There were, of course, other means to stay awake, but Will would so much rather listen to Hannibal dissect the case over and over, missing key details, than have the man press hot kisses against his throat.

At this moment, anyway. Will enjoyed hearing his work analysed.

“And they always get worse.”

Hannibal takes a deep breath, trying to reel in his scattered thoughts. It wasn't that he was stupid, it was just not something he could put his finger on. He stacks what he knows, for what feels like the thousandth time.

"No preference for male or female victims. No set race, class, or age," Hannibal drinks the last dregs of his coffee - the diner coffee is thick and awful at this hour, but he endures it because the other option is to lose his mind to a sleepless stillness that mirrors the dark circles beneath his eyes. "A scattered territory that doesn't suggest a comfort zone - or so large a comfort zone as to not matter."

When the waitress refills his cup, he looks up appreciatively and thanks her for the brown sludge before he waves her off with nearly an inch to spare, into which he empties cream from the white crockery creamer, and a healthy dose of sugar from the blued glass container, continuing his train of thought. "In fact very little to tie any of it together - Jack isn't even sure they're related."

"But there is a pattern," Hannibal asserts, with almost a manic edge to his tone, a desire to convince others that has rubbed him the wrong way against his fellows, against his superiors. "There's a confidence to the cuts, a specific savagery." But if anyone has ever believed him - truly had faith that he even could be right, it's his partner. Hannibal sighs, drinks more oversweet thick coffee.

"They always get worse," he agrees. "But I feel like I could stop it if I could just stop missing... something."

Will drinks his coffee slowly, savoring Hannibal's words to cover the revolting flavor. He was close, he was so close. The only one on the force to believe the killings were related, the only one determined enough to find a pattern when Will had made so sure there should not be one. But there is no such thing as true random, there will always be a fatal human flaw that causes numbers to intersect, patterns to emerge.

He licks his lips and sets his mug down.

"You're missing far less than half the damned team," he offers, a small comfort, but at least a true one. "He's a killer of convenience, the hardest to catch because he has no plan. Or too much of one. A true psychopath."

"I don't think he has no plan, I think he's just..." Hannibal makes a faintly frustrated noise. "He's going somewhere with it. Someplace I can't quite follow yet."

The smile Will offers is gentle, a placating thing. His partner is weary, he's allowing the guilt for not saving so many to eat away at him. It's been more work for Will to keep him above water than to cover up. One pastime merged into another so quickly and effortlessly he forgot when it happened.

Hannibal lifts his eyes again and smiles gratefully, appreciative for the instant belief, the acceptance. He knows partners support each other, but they also had always from the start had the sort of professional relationship where they'd kept each other in shape. Any flights of fancy that ventured too far off course, any connections that were just something out of twilight zone or the Sunday scaries, they'd smack each other into shape.

There are still moments when Hannibal wonders if his partner is humoring him, if only because the whole rest of the world refuses to. He checks his watch, stretches his way to his

feet, but the motion aborts halfway when the locked up muscles of his shoulders refuse to loosen into the motion, and Hannibal sighs and claims his hat and coat from the pegs at the end of the booth, tucking the bills to cover the food and tip under the edge of his emptied plate.

"I don't know if I should want it to be random or not," He says, settling the hat low over his eyes against the glare of the diner lights. "But someone out there who's afraid is going to be next, and there's a reason. If I just knew it."

He arches his eyebrows back at Will, to be sure his partner was ready, and leads the way out. They should radio off - taking their break at the end of their day this way was frowned upon, but too much earlier and there was no place open to eat, and usually they were rushed through most of the night with reports, investigations, followups.

Hannibal climbs into the marked ford, parked way at the back of the lot where it won't attract too much negative attention - lately people had taken to kicking dents in the fenders of police cars, or cutting the rubber tires. The door on the other side slams as Will gets in next to him, but before he can reach for the radio, his partner pushes him back against the closed door behind him, sliding across the bench seat and practically into his lap.

Will’s hand slides up on reflex to lock the door, it wouldn’t do either of them good to tumble out, back of the lot or not, and he offers a smile.

“I suppose I’ll have to deal with you tasting like bad diner coffee.” He murmurs. He knows after the initial insinuation, getting Hannibal’s mind down to a soft white noise won’t take effort, though he will expend it. There is something so rewarding about seeing his partner undone, and so easily. He hadn’t been wrong when he’d first made the offer and it’s been an enjoyable game since.

"Same as you," Hannibal answers, looking nervously over his shoulder at the lot, then over Will's at the other side. They are screened under the sickly trees set to give the back some privacy from the next block over, but it's still risky. A witness would undo all their care - and while it was dangerous for any man to engage this way with another, cops took it personal amongst their own, as if it dragged the entire force down through the mud with them.

They have the cover of darkness, and the near-empty lot for perhaps half an hour. Then a shift change. Though Will has found it tends to not matter by that point, it keeps Hannibal on just the right edge of aware.

“If you go home as you are, you won’t sleep.” He raises an eyebrow as though challenging Hannibal to argue, “And you need to.”

"You could have stopped me on the second cup of coffee," Hannibal suggests, but he's not protesting much. The worry is a thrill, the question of being caught and the hammering of his heart isn’t' all fear. Before Will, he'd had other partners - in this sense as well as others - but never one willing to take risks like this. It's uniquely Will, and dangerously intoxicating.

He shifts, getting grips at the sides of Will's coat, swinging his legs up onto the seat underneath Will's even as he protests weakly, pulling him closer. "We could both go home,"

he says, but it's without much hope. Try as he might, Hannibal couldn't get Will to settle down and do this someplace truly safe. It was always these rushed encounters that left Hannibal dizzied and pleased, but curled alone in his bed at the end of the day, tired enough to sleep but sometimes wishing...

It hardly mattered. He grips tighter with his handholds when Will shakes his head, and pulls him closer.

Home implies comfort, it implies intimacy Will doesn't need clouding Hannibal's mind. He would see his home, he was certain, would allow himself to be pushed into bed, to tear away Hannibal's clothes as the man would tear at his, would allow himself to lock his mind away, to let it rest, and to enjoy the time properly. But he isn't close enough yet, he hasn't found the links between the victims, hasn't caught Will at a mistake.

He hasn't yet earned it.

He can give him this, though, in abundance. When he kisses him it's familiar, a comfort more than a demand, and he hums as he breathes gently against Hannibal's face, hands seeking under his coat to press his palms flat against his back, feel the heat seep into his fingers.

"He's clever," he breathes as he pulls away, tonguing his bottom lip in an absent gesture as he rolls his hips down with a quiet groan, "Clever killers grow lazy, he'll mess up."

Hannibal pulls at the hem of Will's starched shirt until it comes free from under his belt, then slides his thumbs under the hem of his pants at the back, with his fingers around the belt to pull him closer still, even as he rolls his hips up.

Though he would hardly allow anyone to suggest he was old - certainly not too old for his job, Hannibal would certainly have allowed mature. Too mature, before William had finally gotten tired of hinting to him in movie theaters and staring at him over silently shared drinks while Hannibal debated round and round with himself about finally cracking and asking for it, to be so turned on by even the thought of rutting like teenagers in a car. That was before Will had slipped his hand into Hannibal's lap while they watched Strangers on a Train late show in a darkened theater, giving him the most pointed ultimatum he'd ever gotten on the subject.

"Clever killers get bored," Hannibal answers, but then he surrenders a very quiet groan, and pulls their hips together again, rolling his own up for friction even with all that fabric between them. "He hasn't yet," Hannibal sighs, and then pulls in a sharp breath, slipping his hands free to brush over the sensitive skin of Will's sides, before he can start working the man's belt. He kisses Will again before he glances over his shoulder out at the world again, to be sure they're alone in it.

The seat springs only protest faintly as Will gets a knee up between Hannibal's thighs for him to push against, as Hannibal works the buckle patiently, deliberately, while Will yanks at Hannibal's to reciprocate. "Maybe he's so clever he can keep entertaining himself with it for years to come."

Will shakes his head, glad he can hide his smile behind their activity. He knows he's clever, he's been at this for years, most of them with Hannibal diligently at his side, solving cases that weren't this. Until he had gotten bored. And boredom had led to a falsely sloppy killing, the start to this entire mess of a situation.

"If he gets bored he'll change something," Will pants quietly, finally having worked the belt free and setting his fingers to fumble against the button of Hannibal's trousers. "He changes something, we'll see it. He can't keep up such a pattern for years, it would take unbelievable effort."

His lips part on a loud, quick gasp of air as Hannibal gets his hands on him first, twisting just so to bend Will's shoulders forward, set his eyelids to fluttering.

"Fuck…" he leans down far enough to kiss him, drawing his free hand up to tug his hair and tilt Hannibal's head back at a pleasing angle. He lifts his eyes when Hannibal closes his, scanning the empty lot as carefully as Hannibal had been, and finding it still blissfully empty. When he breaks the kiss he slides his lips down his jaw and to his throat, licking the pulse point before just pressing his lips there, moaning quietly as Hannibal starts a quick, sweet rhythm.

As much as Hannibal might have continued the discussion, he was too distracted, tipping his head back to bare his neck vulnerably to Will's mouth, reaching up with his free hand to cradle it against the back of Will's head and encourage him there. Will isn't quite rocking into Hannibal's quick strokes, but his hips surge into it from time to time, in tune with Will's soft noises.

"Oh," he breathes, to keep himself from getting any louder, and then he pulls Will tighter against him, clinging almost desperate as he turns his cheek hard against Will's his breath pushing harsh at the space just behind his ear when Will finally pushes the hem of his boxers down enough to get a hand on him, not bothering to tease, just skin on skin and a firm grip. As if there was no time to waste.

There really wasn't, of course, but that was circumstantial, a product of where they were, rather than a desire to only rush - at least, Hannibal has convinced himself that. It's a lie that's growing thinner the more times he tells it to himself, the more times he uses it to put off asking what this really was.

"Easy, Will," he begs, for just a few seconds longer - his partner's rough, dry palm with gun toughness that was just different enough from his own, and his partner's knowledge on how exactly to take Hannibal apart, are rushing him faster than he'd like.

Will grants one mercy but not another; his grip tightens as his hand slows.

"I'll drive back," he assures him, clear permission – perhaps request – for Hannibal to just ride this out and let go. for all his games, there is a significant amount of genuine attachment he feels towards the man, he wants him to sleep for selfless reasons as strongly as he does for selfish ones. He moans a quiet encouragement into Hannibal's ear and bends his body more, pliant and submissive, and enjoying every motion.

With that, at least, he has never had to lie.

There aren't many between them, but there are many open, unsaid holes in what they have said. Hannibal steps around them, because men like them aren't meant for confrontation - not on matters like this. What they have is enough, and it might crumble as surely as his resolve when Will hissed gentle reassurances in his ear and drove him to the edge so fast his mind scattered away, Hannibal's body going from exhausted to razors-edge wired in a short enough period that sweat springs up cold on his lower back, and his muscles go tense.

They're both close when Will finally relents and kisses Hannibal again, thumbing the slit until he swallows his low groan of pleasure. It doesn't take long before Will's tipping after, body trembling and lips parted on loud quick breaths as he presses their foreheads together. When they catch their breath he presses their lips together again, once, as almost a reassurance, before sitting back and pulling out a napkin from the diner from his pocket to clean his fingers. He passes another to Hannibal with a smirk.

Hannibal's shirt has seen the worst of it - it usually does. He'll go home and spill coffee on it before he takes it to the cleaners, as he always does. He mops at it halfheartedly with the handkerchief and finds his muscles uncoiling slowly into laxity, his mind adrift in afterglow that fades as slowly as the streetlights lose usefulness, even as Will has already finished rearranging them into their proper seats, and turned the car on.

After a moment, he regains the presence of mind to find two mints from the diner in his pockets, passing one to Will, and undoing the paper from the other to settle it into his mouth, leaning back against the seat and doing his belt up so he didn't look half so sloppy as he felt - though perhaps still as tired. He passes the back of his sleeve over his mouth, as if that might soothe some of the flush from it, might contract his irises down to regular size.

"You could always stay," he suggests, but it's not an argument. It's just a wistful thing, on Hannibal's drifting voice, and he leans back in the seat, pushes his feet forward in the footwell and turns his hat down lower in his eyes as Will drives them back, so he doesn't have to see the reaction.

Will doesn't outwardly give one, he guides the Ford out of the lot and down the street, one hand on the steering wheel and the other against his lips, just gently pressing there in thought. He knows it's a point of conflict, his desire to avoid intimacy or taking this further than quick fumbling in car at ungodly hours.

He can hear Hannibal's breathing evening out but he knows his partner isn't sleeping. He pulls up outside his apartment complex before looking over. if circumstances were different, he wouldn't think twice. He had seduced the man by choice and for personal preference, the fact that he happened to be the only man who could realistically catch him was just a significant bump in the road.

He can see the sky turning lighter in the east, there are more cars on the road now with the early morning commuters starting their trip. Regardless, he leans over and kisses Hannibal's forehead through his hat, since the other hasn't made the effort to remove it, and smiles.

“I will stay after the case.” He promises. And it’s one he can keep; he will be with the man after this case closes one way or another.

Looking up from under the brim of his hat, Hannibal smiles in answer. It's the first promise he's gotten on the matter, the first acknowledgment that it could even happen. It hinged on something that was, perhaps, impossible. It was still a term, and much as it felt out of his reach, it left Hannibal feeling like he had one foot on solid ground at least.

He knows the promise is genuine. Hannibal reaches out and gives Will an affectionate pat on the shoulder. "You better have a bag ready then," he suggests, with more confidence than he feels, before he eases out of the patrol car. Halfway up the front steps of the apartment, a lithe black stray dashes after, and Hannibal holds the door open to let the cat inside, before he looks back. He stands on the step and watches Will put the car in reverse.

He drags himself up the four flights of stairs, and wishes he were as tired as Will had sought to leave him - that he could just fall into bed and sleep. He feeds the strays on his balcony, drags himself out of his suit and lays face down in the bed anyway, but his mind goes back to that first girl always. What was it about her? Why had the killer suddenly started to strike then - just at her? So obvious and angry, frustrated, perhaps that no one else saw his work.

Hannibal closes his eyes and wonders if the trigger was the lack of recognition. He thinks maybe that's something, as his eyes finally close and he settles to sleep.

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Will got into this work early. A family tradition. Both his parents had been officers, his sister was a sergeant, it was almost a given that Will do the same. So he had. But he had done so determined to work in a different city; there were enough Grahams where he was from to add another. He had chosen to make his name elsewhere. He rarely stayed in touch.

Will is good at his job, he’s meticulous and careful, works quickly and knows how to see connections where others see nothing at all. Perhaps that was why he was sent to Hannibal as a partner; they were both as good as the other, but somehow apart from the rest. Sometimes making jumps neither could explain that panned out for the better. They had a good record and respect enough to choose their own team if they needed one.

With this case, the request had been denied. There was no evidence to say the killings were connected, and people could not be spared to follow up on leads only Will or Hannibal could see. It was less than a boost in morale, but neither of them slowed their pace. Hannibal scoured the backgrounds of every victim while Will conducted interviews with those close enough to matter. On nights when paperwork became too unbearable, he would add another name to their list for the morning.

It was rarely dull, but they didn’t seem to progress beyond an ever-increasing list of victims and no leads on the perpetrator.

“Fuck,” Will isn’t a fan of blood, especially his own, but it is an addiction. Something primal hums through his bones at the sight of it. he presses his finger into his mouth and frowns at the offending paper that had sliced him.

“You know what Jack’ll say when you show him this,” he mumbles around his finger, flicking his eyes up at Hannibal, “Drug dealers keep murder a business in this town.”

Hannibal flicks his eyes at the cut, at Will's blood welling up from it and the way it goes straight to his mouth. He sighs, and fishes in the inner pocket of his coat for a band-aid.

"This isn't the same," He explains, but he knows it won't fly with Jack. "Drug dealers... drug suppliers, they don't have the patience for this. They hit brutal, fast, and get out of there. They want to make a point, but it's not this point."

They didn't stick around and take strips of skin off, or leave the bodies out to be found. "This is the same as the others," he asserts. "I'm sure of it."

Hannibal sighs, parts the paper packaging on the band aid, and offers it to Will. "Why last night, though? He's been quiet for ages... why last night." Turning suddenly, Hannibal heads for the periodical room - empty at this hour of the morning - and checks the early editions. Nothing - the killer waited too long to make those, but there'd be extras or the evening papers would have it.

Unless he could... Hannibal turns suddenly enough to almost run into Will. "What if we hold it back?" he asks.

Will’s hands go up on reflex in a gesture of surrender and he cocks his head.

“Hold what back?”

It had been a rush kill, a rash one. Too early in the morning, just before dawn and just after seeing Hannibal to his home. It had been the ultimate risk, and a thrill enough to keep Will awake for the morning and the length of their shift so far. But it had been necessary, a promise of sorts to go with his other. And Hannibal had picked up on it. slowly but surely they could cut down the variables in this equation, see what triggers were relevant and which were unrealistic.

Attention was the most common reason to kill. It should be the first they remove.

He frowns and rubs the cut through the band-aid with his thumb absently.

“You want to hold the story?”

"If he's killing for attention - if he even exists," Hannibal continues, backing up a step to give Will space again, with an apologetic look. "Then he might get desperate if we take that away. Maybe reach out, put down a demand - that'd be enough to make Jack look at it seriously."

Hannibal sighs, glances back at the papers. "And if it's really just another drug killing, holding it out of the paper won't hurt much."

The only ones who really had to fear angry suppliers were drug dealers anyway. Not that Hannibal abided murder in any form - theoretically justifiable or not, he was a firm believer that there were better solutions. "We could twist some arms," he continues, not much liking the idea. "God help us if Jack finds out, but it could be a break."

Will purses his lips in an amused smile but inclines his head in agreement. He'll go down for this if Jack finds out, they both will. But he will give Hannibal the chance to try.

"Make the call," he says. He himself presses the receiver between his ear and shoulder and dials one specific number. The press, like any hierarchy, has insiders willing to sell out. those are the ones they need to control more than the major newspapers. They've had their dealings in the past with many, some they have negotiated with enough for a deal.

"Freddie," Will purrs, rolling his eyes at Hannibal when the other gives him a pained look, telephone pressed to his own ear, on hold it seems, "You remember our deal or must I reiterate?"

Freddie Lounds was one of the most notorious columnists in the city. She could get information where it theoretically did not exist. If she tailored her work ethic and prowess to the police force she would have the highest arrest record. Instead, she sold out for the highest bidder. Will did not consider her a friend, but she considered him often.

Their exchange is brief, filled with its share of flirting and lightly veiled threats. She promises to withhold the article, Will promises dinner, and hangs up with more knowledge of what the press currently has as well as a guarantee of silence for the evening edition.

"You think the skin is significant?" he asks when Hannibal hangs up and rubs his eyes. they're well overdue for lunch. "Or boredom?"

Hannibal's mind takes a moment to come back from the distance of only gently threatening and mostly cajoling the more reputable paper in town to hold the story back as well.

"Yeah, it's..." Hannibal catches himself on the moment of revelation. "It's like he's trying to show us there's more underneath what we can see."

"The skin here, that first girl... her face off like it was," Hannibal shifts through the stack of folders on his desk, digs down underneath to the lowest one, hidden from Jack who had told him to cold-case it long ago. "There's more that we can't see, but he thinks he can."

Hannibal skips the pictures and goes back to the details, all the way back into the life details, though she has no priors. But as quickly as his hope had sprung up, it begins to fade again. Her life appears mundane - married, two kids - her husband didn't seem to drink any. Maybe it was just madness. He sits back in his chair again, tosses a weary glance up at Will. "You're probably ready for lunch, I'm sorry." He tucks the folder closed, begins to leave it on the desk, and then on a whim, brings it.

"Maybe there's something in the unrelated reports - priors filed earlier in their life. Or maybe it's nothing at all and this guy really is just crazy."

"It's staggering how few true psychopaths are crazy." Will responds, but he doesn't stop Hannibal taking the folder. There are days when Hannibal gets so far into the work, so deep, that Will feels like an author whose work is being analysed in an English classroom. So much meaning is put to genuinely meaningless details. But it's astounding to watch him work

through it, to hear him bounce ideas off of the person who had brought that folder into his hands.

Perhaps that's why Will does it, to see how Hannibal sees him if he were to peel away the normalcy, show up on his doorstep after a kill and tilt his head, holding his bloodied glasses in one hand and the edge of his shirt in his other to clean them. He enjoys watching Hannibal's mind work, he has never bored him.

They have enough time to get something to go before they have to return to the office. Will can't remember the last time they had had the chance to sit down to a proper dinner or a proper meal together. Catching bad coffee at the diner at painful hours of the morning didn't count. He opts for a salad, something that will give him enough energy to make it through the rest of the day. And coffee. Something stronger and aromatic and nothing like the dark smelly water their office offered.

Hannibal trusts Will to order for him, by the time they reach the place he has the folder open again, risking carsickness by reading as they go, but he's reading the report again and again, trying to find something that stuck out in his mind. Early thirties, housewife, not badly off. No prior arrests - but...

The responding officer referenced a case from earlier, saying he could identify the woman as the same he'd spoken to in an earlier interview, and at the back of the folder - a carbon copy of the earlier report.

Will hands him the paper wrapped submarine sandwich, a messy choice but substantial enough to make up for what he'd skipped that morning sleeping in. "Both her kids were in the hospital the year before - one broke his arm twice that year, the other had a bad slip, it says."

He's thinking on it. He doesn't want to be thinking about it, but he can almost see the picture. He tucks the sandwich in his lap absently, can feel that it's warm, probably meatball, and keeps his eyes on the report. "Both times it was the mother that brought them in."

Will sips his coffee and carefully flicks the indicator on with the base of the cup before changing lanes. There's a thrill in seeing your work understood, in seeing the subtleties unfold and connect. She had been one of Will's least favourite victims. She was the hardest to cover up. the drug dealer in the alley? Could have been killed by anyone with a grudge. But a housewife with two children is a far smaller target for anyone.

It is very rare for the woman to be abusive in a marriage, to her children and husband. There is almost a social taboo about accusing a woman of such things given how often they are victims of it.

"I thought we lived in a city small enough to not warrant a vigilante killer." Will says quietly. He flicks his eyes to Hannibal to show him he understands, that he's willing to pursue the investigation further.

"Maybe," Hannibal answers, glancing out the window as if the grey stone faces of the buildings go by. "Maybe it's not a real vigilante. Maybe he just needs the excuse."

“Do you think the rest are the same?” Will asks, pulling into the lot one-handed before setting his paper cup between his knees to manoeuvre the Ford into its designated place. If Hannibal digs deep enough, and Will is certain he will, he will find a connection, this connection, between all the victims on Will’s list. Every single one of them deserved to die. And every single one of them would have lived, for a long, long time, tormenting those unable to speak out.

"If there is a pattern," Hannibal answers, looking back, flipping through the file one last time in case anything screams out at him - nothing does, but now he has a dozen other files to pick up, to hunt back through potential police reports filed unrelated to the cases, but related to the victims. "That's it."

“It would be enough for Jack.” Will says finally, killing the engine and turning to regard his partner with a calm look. His eyes lower to the man’s lips a moment, and he presses his own together in an unconscious gesture before taking up his coffee and salad and balancing them to open the door. “So let’s find it.”

"It might be enough for Jack," Hannibal allows. "He'll hate being wrong though. He always does. We'd better be ready to deliver when we walk into his office."

For the first time in a long while, Detective Lecter smiles at his partner - and it's not a forced grin, or answering one of Will's suggestive looks, but honest, triumphant. It's not much yet, but it could be a lot. Hannibal has started to fan the folders out on his desk, absently unfolding the paper wrapping around his sub when Will clears his throat.

It's been an unspoken rule between them that they don't talk business through lunch. Both of them, when given the opportunity, would overwork. It's as often Hannibal's job to remind Will as the other way around, so Hannibal glances up sheepishly and pushes the folders back away, takes up his sandwich and considers how best to approach it.

"How's your family?" He asks, tamely. He knows Will doesn't much like to talk about them, but it's polite and it's not work, but it is safe for work. They didn't always have such mundane conversations when they had even a decent amount of privacy.

Will regards Hannibal with a slightly exasperated look as he pours dressing in slow circles from the little container provided. He licks away the drop that slips down his thumb and picks up his fork.

“Keeping New Orleans safe.” He replies at length. He doesn’t offer the same question back, family is a far more difficult topic for Hannibal than it is for Will to talk about; Will simply skirts it and avoids it, for Hannibal it brings up things he’d rather not remember. He does relent, though.

“I haven’t heard much. Christmas is still four months away, as is the obligatory Graham catch-up phone call.” He takes a bite of lunch and chews carefully. It’s just past 2pm now, and the weather is looking to turn for the worse. And if the look Hannibal got staring at those files before Will had forced him to set them aside was anything to go by, they still had perhaps 12 hours to look forward to in this office.

The department is quiet, they're lucky enough to have their desks by the window out of the way of most of the hum of activity. Regardless, it's unusual. Life goes on around them as the apparently unrelated killings pile up, and in the lull paperwork has to be filed, reports written, phone calls made… it's days like these Will wishes they would invite new potential interns for, days where the mundane is the only thing waiting for them. As much as he loves his job, and as good at it as he is, it's far from glamorous.

"Where would you rather be?" he offers after a long enough pause. It's rarely uncomfortable between them, they're too used to each other, Will too used to Hannibal's meditative silences, the other too used to Will's compulsive need to fidget with something. When Hannibal gives him a look, Will shakes his head, his smile crooked but genuine.

Hannibal looks up, trying to navigate his sandwich without losing half of it into his lap before he gives up and sets it down, digging the camp utensil set he keeps in his lower desk drawer out. He isn't sure what the question means, but he waits for Will to clarify - sometimes it takes him a little while to remember that while Hannibal was usually on the same wavelength, he couldn't read thoughts.

"If the heavens opened up and struck Jack Crawford on the head enough to concuss him into being a human being and he gave you a fucken vacation, where would you rather be than here?"

"I haven't had a vacation since I was discharged," Hannibal answers, amused. But he does consider the theory put forth, the intellectual challenge. He'd been a lot of places in his younger days, not ten years ago yet. War was enough to kill a lot of the wanderlust he'd had. "Maybe Yellowstone. Maybe South America. The Bahamas? I hadn't ever thought about it."

He chuckles, humorlessly, and digs a meatball out of his sandwich with the camp fork. "I doubt I'll get a vacation before I retire. Why, you thinking of going somewhere?"

It wasn't likely the question was rhetorical, but it sounded a little like idea mining, like maybe Will needed a break from the department - not that Hannibal could hardly blame him, but the thought of the other going on vacation strikes him strangely. It doesn't hurt so much as threatens to hurt. Hannibal looks blank for a moment, as he reminds himself to get it together. "Try Cuba, bring me back some cigars."

Will snorts and shakes his head again as he navigates his salad with slightly more success than Hannibal was with his sandwich.

"Oh, no, I think this town's my lot." He's never travelled far. He got out of New Orleans quickly but he's never had much desire to get out further than where he was. He had been just too young to be conscripted for the war, so that hadn't influenced his choices, but Will doesn't see himself leaving for a while, if ever.

"I think, though," he adds as an afterthought, taking a long sip of his coffee with an appreciative sound following, "That if I did get out, I'd go to the mountains. Get as far away from civilization and people as I could. Just… out."

"The city's getting to you that bad?" Hannibal asks, surprised. If anyone seemed like they had the temperament for living in the city, it was his partner. Quick thinking, quick moving. Adaptive. There were times when the concrete and brick made him feel lost or trapped in a big stone maze. There were times he loved it, but usually Hannibal felt a little out of his element. A relic. Will, however, was always in his stride here. Fast living, fast... everything.

Will shrugs, selecting another forkful of green leaves and tuna and setting just his teeth against the fork to pull it into his mouth.

“You wouldn’t go back to some places you’d been?” he asks.

"There's nothing there at some of the places I've been," Hannibal answers, honestly, but then he rolls his shoulders. "Maybe in ten more years, in twenty, but not until they had time to get back together."

Time to forget. Time to have some kids and grow out of those hollow eyed looks they'd all had - hell, he'd had. His family had run here to escape the German invasion, and after the war, he'd followed, stayed. America was mostly untouched. He quirks his mouth up at the corner. "The mountains, really? You'd go crazy. Some places don't even have electricity or indoor plumbing. I do believe the first sight of an outhouse'd send you back to the nearest city."

Will laughs, and it’s a genuine sound, a soft one that makes it easier to believe that he was a younger man in the force, not someone as beaten down and exhausted as some were. When he looks up at Hannibal his eyes are crinkled at the corners and he’s fighting a grin.

“I lived in New Orleans,” he reminds him, making a placating gesture, “Not to say the entire place is wanting in plumbing and electricity but there are places.”

He sighs and rests his cheek against his hand, just watching his friend.

“If I ever do get there,” he says, “To the mountains with the outhouses you’re so excited about, I’ll make sure to take you with me. Make you smile properly over something that doesn’t involve corpses and cold cases.”

He presses his eyes closed a moment before just opening one.

“Shit. Sorry. Lunch. We’re not still doing that stupid penalty thing are we?”

And it’s comfortable again, genuinely nice to talk to someone who enjoys his company and has a lot to offer back. Will wishes, sincerely, that they had more time for things like this. That his enjoyment of Hannibal outside the stress outweighed his enjoyment of seeing him work through his intricate kills.

For his part, Hannibal has fallen quiet, the smile still lingering - but the sentiment strikes him oddly. Strongly. Will had never alluded to them ever sharing anything more than a few hours, a night at most. There was the promise here of - Hannibal didn't know what. Maybe just a couple nights. Maybe a vacation, like Will said.

Well, it was hardly like two fellas like them could expect much more than that, he chastizes himself, and he arches his eyebrows and tips his head down. "You made me, the last time."

It was a small slip on Will's part, just an allusion to work rather than anything real, so he lets Will off pretty lightly. "Guys and Dolls," he says, "Sit Down, You're Rockin' the Boat."

He sits back, deeply amused, hands folded over his chest as he waits, glancing back at the department. Well not much punishment, but the public drunks and depressed looking booking clerks are in for a treat. Will's a surprisingly good singer. It was far more embarrassing when Detective Lecter was on the losing end.

Will cringes, but the smile's very much evident. He curls two fingers over his lips for a moment before breathing a quiet curse and sitting up straighter. Fair's fair. And he has made Hannibal sing far worse things to a far more… receptive… crowd. He knows for a fact that Beverley still hums Tom Dick or Harry whenever they're in the same vicinity.

He sits back, rolling his shoulders before humming, a low note to get himself in key before just opening his mouth and going for it. Will's voice is slightly lower when he sings than when he speaks, and it's far more difficult to remain stoic and sit still when he's singing goddamn showtunes than he'd like it to be.

All in all, the people who get the most enjoyment out of it are Hannibal and two of the drunks still riding the high wave of intoxication. He does get a few cheers and a round of applause, and thankfully no angry door slamming from Jack's office; perhaps the man is out enjoying his own lunch.

Will waves off the attention and turns back to Hannibal with his cheeks slightly flushed and his expression pained.

"You're an asshole, Lecter." He informs him, taking up his coffee cup to empty it in one long drink. "Come on. We have so much paperwork we'll be here a year."

Hannibal arches his eyebrows, deigns to - very briefly - enjoy his victory. This was usual, the sort of clowning that was expected in a police department when tensions were highest. It was how they survived. Each partner pair had their own set of rules. It was one-upsmanship that had lead Will and Hannibal to showtunes - after Hannibal had discovered Will could sing, anyway. Very briefly, he winks, passes his tongue over his lower lip, and then folds the rest of his submarine back into the paper and recovers the stack of folders.

"Alright," he agrees, but the smile lingers as he goes to the grim and onerous task of case followup paperwork. He works what he's officially on first, rushing to get done by five so that the evening can become his own time to look deeper into the issues at hand.

Hours later, the sandwich is still sitting cold and forgotten on his desk, wrapped and shoved aside behind the coffee cup he periodically refills. It's nearly nine when he gets the last of the files together, a neat array that his desk barely holds, but what is laid out in front of him is clear. Some of these people, he'd never have guessed.

Everyone's life is a web of minor incidents, small reports. Perhaps they testified in this case or that, perhaps someone overly concerned had called the cops, but it was subtle. All of it was subtle aside from the outliers, but they were... they were cries for attention. Meant to draw the eye.

"It's all the same," Hannibal relents, his elbows on his desk and his hands pushed against his scalp, rifled through his hair. "The dealers, the toughs - that pimp on southside. They're pointers."

He rubs his hands down over his face and sits back. "How did he see it? I'm not even sure I see it - there's maybe one report on some of these guys - a concerned neighbor with a noise complaint, a single trip to the hospital." Hannibal lifts his hands and rubs his eyes, glances up at the clock, and feels exhausted all of a sudden. "It's like he could look at all this, see these tiny incidents and..."

Hannibal sits bolt upright. A cop, shit. Someone with access to police reports. Someone with the time to comb them for indicators.

Will rubs his eyes with a tired groan, the motion upsetting his glasses enough to tumble to the desk in front of him. he’s exhausted. He’s made sure that the more subtle of the cases made it to Hannibal’s desk as he covered most of their paperwork for recent cases and took on the more glaringly obvious kills to read over. he couldn’t made it too simple for him.

He can hear the exhaustion in Hannibal’s voice, the awe he feels – perhaps without wanting to – at witnessing someone kill so obviously for such subtle things. He can hear the moment it clicks, can feel the energy hum off of Hannibal at the desk across from his. He smiles, hiding it behind another gesture to rub his face. It had taken years but it was worth it. almost.

When he pushes his glasses up his nose this time he tilts his head, brows furrowed in gentle confusion and a desire for an explanation. It’s late in the evening, they are – again – the only ones here. And Will wants to know how much Hannibal knows, he wants to know if they’ll ever make it to the mountains with unsolved cases behind them, or if he’ll wake up in Hannibal’s arms tomorrow morning, sated and sore.

"It's a cop," Hannibal says, with as much conviction as he'd had that the cases were all interconnected. "The only way he could know is if he could see these little reports shuffled aside in the rush."

He takes a deep breath, sounding the words out to himself. He doesn't like the thought, doesn't like the idea that it's one of them at all. They weren't supposed to go outside the definition of the law - certainly not to this extent. But it seems right. No one else could see this connection. No one else would even guess - the dealers maybe, maybe one or two of these, but he'd left his signature.

Hannibal sighs it out and folds the manila folder on his desk carefully closed. "It's still not enough for Jack. He'll want a name. We'll need to know who else has pulled these earlier files or we'll have a witch hunt, Will."

Will purses his lips in apparent concern. “We’ll have a witch hunt regardless, you know how well the force reacts when its own are accused.” And Jack will not let this one fly, not when the accusation is so strong on something so small. It’s not even a guarantee that they’re connected through what Hannibal has found; none of the convictions match, they’re all different things. The only connecting tether is that the people are considered to be socially wrong.

And that had always been the idea, really. You are your art.

He sighs.

“Look. You’re dead on your feet. I can’t see straight. Let’s just… go home. Sleep it off, and approach this with clear heads in the morning. I’ll go to records tomorrow to see who signed the files out, maybe we’ll have something for Jack after that.”

He gives Hannibal a look until the other nods his agreement – though he is displeased by it – and stands up. he stretches slowly, arms up above his head as he pulls his muscles tense and groans at the feeling after being curled up in his chair most of the day.

He’s close. Hannibal is so close, perhaps just a few days away from naming a name. then the investigation that follows, perhaps the hesitation in connecting the dots beforehand. He can almost imagine the look on Hannibal’s face when it all makes sense. Can imagine him asking why and never getting more than a smile. Even that would be more than anyone else would get.

He takes up the keys from Hannibal’s desk and motions that they should go.

He’ll drive. There was a parking lot near his apartment complex that he could ease the Ford into. He’d allow himself to enjoy a night, for once, before the morning it would bring.

Hannibal is reaching for the keys when Will takes them, but he makes no protest. They should turn them in, Hannibal taking the bus and Will walking - but it's late enough the busses have stopped running, and it'd be dangerous for Will to go out of here on foot at this hour. So the rules bend a little, and they'll take the Ford and sign it back in at first light.

"You won't tell me I'm wrong?" Hannibal asks, half humorously, as he gathers up his coat - his shoulders ache from too long hunched over reports, his wrists sore from writing. He winces as he slings the trench coat over his shoulders, as he recovers his hat from the lower drawer on the left side and tosses out the remains of his sub - too long room temperature to not be a threat. "Maybe it's someone else. Maybe someone at the hospital who would see..."

No, they'd have found it sooner. Hannibal takes a deep breath of city air when they're out past the night clerk, after turning the files back in. It smells like tar and gasoline and smoke and grit. Like car exhaust. Like maybe somewhere it's going to rain, but the city would never see it. Hannibal works his teeth over his lower lip, once.

"I don't want to know them," he decides, and he turns for the lot where they park the squad cars. He reaches out, just once, and even that's risky, and touches Will on the lower back, like

reassuring himself the other man was there, solid as he'd always been. Like he'd very much have liked to lean on his partner at that moment.

Will lets out a breath and gently rolls his shoulders back, bending his back against Hannibal's palm but not in a way to suggest he resents it being there. It's quiet, the lot is empty, but neither want to risk it, not after they'd signed the car out at a time usually not allowed. But the weight Hannibal puts on the words, the way he suddenly seems more tense, upset, tired on every level of his being… Will doesn't resist pressing his lips to the other man's when they're safely inside the car.

It's slow, lingering, Will's eyes are closed and his breath fans out gently against Hannibal's face. Then he parts his lips on a sigh and pulls away.

"I don't want to believe it either." He tells him, eyes hooded, tired, before he sits up straighter and starts the car. He doesn't protest the gentle touch against his side and down to his thigh before Hannibal sits back and straps in. he rubs his eyes and shakes his head to keep himself awake before pulling out of the lot. "But I won't tell you you're wrong."

There's too much evidence pointing to it being someone on the force, too many files no one else sees, too much knowledge of how they function to not leave the most subtle of clues… Will chews his lip as he navigates his way down the familiar roads to Hannibal's place. Surprisingly, there's a space on the road right in front of the building, the meter doesn't kick in until 7am the next morning by which time they'll be back at work.

He kills the engine and avoids Hannibal's look of surprise. Then he takes a breath, letting it out in a nervous sort of sigh and presses his lips together. He'd promised after the case, when it was done so they could celebrate it but… he's close. Too close for Will to be comfortable. Close enough for him to want to take measures. He bites his top lip lightly before turning to Hannibal again and taking a moment before glancing up and meeting his eyes. he wants to see if he'll ask, or if Will will have to imply.

"Come up," Hannibal says, because he wants this no matter how far it does or doesn't go, wants Will to sit in the space, as if that will make this somehow all real. "I'll make coffee. You're as tired as I am, you shouldn't drive."

He pulls the door handle and lets himself out, works the lock to be sure the car will stay secure - the streetside parking has always made him nervous, though he'd grown up someplace you could leave your horse to wander and trust to get it back - as fantastically backward as that thought was.

Miraculously, Will follows. Hannibal isn't sure if he feels triumphant or nervous - he settles on the latter. It's surreal, like William might vanish at his doorway as if he never were, but he doesn't. He's right at Hannibal's shoulder when he unlocks his door after a glance up and down the hall - just in case he might need to explain to a neighbor later, but Will had an excuse for being there, Hannibal had an excuse for having him there.

Then they're in, and the privacy is... overwhelming, briefly. It's more than they've ever had. Hannibal is debating on the point of turning and kissing Will against his own door for once, but a frantic scratching at the window draws him out of such rash thoughts. He laughs,

glances back apologetically, and goes to open the window and allow in the stray tomcat, with faint explanation. "He's decided he lives here."

Will's laugh is quiet, perhaps to keep the privacy properly while they have it, perhaps because he's genuinely amused by the idea of Hannibal having a stray dictate his life. It seems fitting, somehow, that he has cats. They come and go in silence, take only what they need and offer enough in return to set up a gentle conditioning to welcome them back.

Like Will does.

He bites his lip lightly but says nothing on the matter.

The apartment is tasteful, furnished far more expensively than Will's is but it doesn't weigh on the place, it doesn't make one want to watch their step, attempt to be meticulously clean. There are dark hues in earthy colors and soft reds, it's a comfortable place with a decent view considering he's still well within the city proper. Will's is a highrise for widows and young professionals, close to the office and noisy. Here it's much quieter. He wonders if he'll be able to sleep.

He doesn't venture further than where he can see, running his fingers over the cool marble of the countertop in the kitchen as he watches Hannibal interact with the animal and offer it food. It seems like a regular thing, if not this cat then another. Will rests his weight against the counter and just looks, lets his eyes slip out of focus. It's a comfortable silence, one they're used to if not for the unusual setting.

He snaps back to the here and now when Hannibal touches his arm lightly to bring him back, offers an apologetic smile.

"You have boarders often?"

"Just the one," Hannibal assures him. "I feed others, but he's the only one who comes in. He still won't let me touch him, though."

He fetches cream from the kelvinator, shakes the container side to side and has a glance in to be sure it hasn't totally clotted up into butter, and then sugar down from the cabinet. He glances at Will again, quiet, in his space, but exhausted. Just as tired as Hannibal is.

"Partner," he says finally, laying his hands flat on the counter. "Skip the coffee, stay the night. You look more beat than I do for once. The couch folds out, if you're worried about it."

Hannibal offers because he is worried about it - worried that overstepping or grabbing too hard is going to tear this apart like tissue paper. He hasn't been nervous like this since he was younger than Will, he thinks. But Will is just smiling at him, bemused, leaning on his counter, and Hannibal thinks about that kiss in the car, thinks about how many times they'd stolen moments - when they'd walked out of somewhere feeling good about the work they'd done for once. When they put some scumbag behind bars where he couldn't hurt anybody else. When they'd both barely survived a brush with death. When they just felt good - parks and pulloffs, like teenagers, or sometimes out in the world and grass. The backs of movie theaters.

It had always felt real before, it's just that right now it almost doesn't, while Hannibal waits for his answer.

It comes slowly, not to tease but because Will's mind is floating between coherency and not and considering how long he's been pushing for this moment he doesn't want to mar it with wrong words. They're close enough for him to lean over the counter, to brush their noses gently together with a smile before he kisses him again, just as slow. He feels something give, the tension in Hannibal's frame increases by a degree but he doesn't pull away. It's not a good enough answer, or, perhaps, one he's craving so much he can't believe he's gotten it.

"You won't really banish me to the couch, will you?" he asks gently, pulling back.

Hannibal chuckles, and then laughs. It hurts a little, he has no idea why. Maybe it's just how much relief there is. Hannibal reaches across the counter and gets his hands into Will's lapels, dragging him half over it for another kiss. No - he won't banish him to the couch. He wouldn't ever banish Will, probably not from any part of his life.

He pulls their mouths together and this time it's less sweet, more desperate, impatient - he had waited for this, waited a long time.

"We haven't solved the case," he says, when they break for air, and he finally eases his grip. The percolator is growling on the stove, pushing the smell of fresh warm coffee into the air, and Hannibal reluctantly lets go of Will for long enough to take it off the heat. He seizes the handle without a holder - briefly- and then jerks his hand back and shakes it out before he takes up a kitchen towel to move it. "I'm not objecting, but I don't want to push past your terms."

He turns the stove off, and when he looks around again, Will is smiling at him in amused disbelief. As if he was trying to decide if Hannibal was backing out, if the man had cold feet. It's answer enough - to hell with the terms. Hannibal shrugs - he was an honest personality. He had to put it out there. Now that it was out there and past, he starts to move out of the kitchen.

"Last chance for coffee," he says, because he'd made it, it was fresh - if Will wanted any, now that Hannibal knew he was staying, he could have the whole pot if he wanted.

Will just shakes his head. Coffee can wait. Even reheated coffee in the morning would taste better than the stuff at work. And he's awake enough now to not need it; he'll sleep better without the caffeine in his system once they're done. And he'll allow it, the sleep, enjoy the comfort of it, the softness and warmth. For as long as he can anyway.

He follows Hannibal out of the kitchen, this time a little more prepared when the man pulls him close and kisses him again. and it's still desperate, and still needy, but there is a gentleness that underlies it that is familiar, a gentleness that has followed them from movie theaters to the backs of cars, to darkened lots.

Will wraps his arms around Hannibal and just holds him, allows the touching, the press of lips and bodies that nearly upsets their balance until he feels himself walked back enough to press against a wall or a door or something flat enough to keep him stable.

“Sorry,” he breathes, when he’s allowed to. And he’s unsure if he’s apologising for taking so long to get here, for being indelicate, or for the fact that this could possibly never happen again. regardless he doesn’t have much opportunity to say anything else. Blindly, he fumbles for Hannibal’s tie, loosening it before tossing it aside and tugging at his shirt until he’s pulled it from his pants properly and can start on the buttons.

"For what?" Hannibal asks - he has tilted his forehead against Will's own, both of them looking down between them to navigate the confusing tangle of hands and fabric. He works Will's tie free as well, carefully undoing the knot before it gets set - tossed - aside. Then he navigates Will's belt, the familiar backwards to his own that he's used to, and he hums low in his chest when he realizes - perhaps belatedly - that this is the first time he'll see all of the man.

He's seen Will the way Will's seen him - in partially clothed flashes, in allowances of lifted shirts and undone zippers, but never had the luxury of the whole thing. The thought is a rush - a bigger turn on than he'd thought possible for something as simple as the bare form. He rushes the belt, and it goes after the tie. Then he starts on the buttons for Will's shirt and leans away just enough to kiss him again - as if he couldn't get enough this time, trying to convey how much he wants this.

Halfway through unbuttoning Will's shirt he either forgets what he's doing or needs to know that Will's as hungry for this as he is - as if their mouths together aren't any indicator, and he instead seizes with one hand at Will's hip, cupping the other over his hardening cock and rubbing with the palm of his hand, feeling that Will's at least as hard as he is and he groans into the kiss, into Will's open mouth, honest and eager.

Will moans and rolls his hips into the hold, his own hands pausing in their frantic undressing to just enjoy it. He pants when they break again, and laughs gently when his fingers catch against the belt as Hannibal’s had. It feels oddly youthful, even more so than the first few times fumbling in the car to get off had. The desperation, the enjoyment of getting things wrong and working to rectify them… they don’t know each other yet, not this well. Will knows how to twist his palm to get Hannibal’s voice to break but he doesn’t know what anything else triggers in him, has no idea if he’s ticklish or if he likes feeling hands slide over his skin.

He manages the belt, finally, and doesn’t hesitate with the button and zipper. He can feel the gentle trembling in his own body echoed in Hannibal’s and smiles wider, nudging Hannibal’s chin up gently to kiss him again, a quick promise, before letting out a breath and sinking to his knees. He’s had experience enough, as any man with his preferences can have in 1953, and he’s fairly sure that Hannibal will enjoy what he’s about to do even if he doesn’t manage it quite as gracefully has he had in the past.

He nuzzles, licks lightly against the fabric of his underwear before tugging it down and taking the head into his mouth to start. If he could, he would grin. The reaction is far better than he’d imagined it could be, a mix of surprise, disbelief and surrender as Hannibal drops a hand to rest in Will’s hair, lets his fingers tangle in the curls and grip. And he makes a sound, a soft thing, low in his chest to be more a vibration, so Will takes him deeper.

Hannibal has to bend forward and grip the wall behind Will, leaning heavily against it as his knees threaten to give, when the fine, nervous-excited tremble turns into an all out shiver - as if his body can't believe the good things happening to it. This is new - it had always been too much of a lowering of their guard before, took up too much attention that they needed to keep an eye out for any sign they might get noticed.

But here - in the hallway outside Hannibal's bedroom, there's not even a window to threaten them. Just the two of them, and Hannibal's voice crawling out of him in noises that aren't quite surprised but he can't seem to quite keep them down. It was good, it was still undeniably Will - still those rough familiar hands easing his pants over his hips like Hannibal had enough stability to even step out of them.

The soft curls under his fingers, the way he can feel the motion in two ways - the slightly detached way his hand moves along with Will's head, never insisting just stroking encouragingly, running his fingers through enough to tousle but not thoroughly dishevel. Then direct - and he's almost embarrassingly hard faster than he'd have liked, his breaths in gasps, then low sounds, before he finally catches himself - he feels like a teenager, but he won't let it overtake him like he was one.

Yet as close as he is, the divide in his focus in keeping him upright keeps him maddeningly on the edge - as much as he doesn't want it to be over, it's right there on the edge and he just can't. He flirts with it a moment longer, two, before he curls his hand a little more firmly in Will's hair. "Will you better... I can't, not standing up," he breathes, his words a stumble. He huffs out a breath. "I want to see you too. All of you for a change."

Will pulls back and rests his forehead against Hannibal’s stomach as he catches his breath. He’s grinning, satisfied with the response, and when he looks up his expression is almost adoring. He tilts his head into the soft hand still holding him before pressing his lips to the flushed skin of Hannibal’s stomach and standing up.

“I better what?” he asks, and his voice is lower, rougher, and the smile slips smoothly from soft to mischievous as he passes Hannibal on his way to what he assumes is his bedroom. He guesses right, anyway, and undoes his cuffs carefully before pulling off his shirt. He doesn’t fold it so much as roll it up, he’ll be a mess in the morning, put it down to working a crazy shift and sleeping in the car if anyone asks.

Then he turns, cocking his head a little in amusement at how dishevelled Hannibal looks despite Will being the one whose hair is most likely standing on end. He keeps watching, eyes alternating between Hannibal’s eyes and his lips, occasionally slipping lower, as his hands work the catch and he slides his pants off, bending at the waist to remove his socks in the same movement. When he straightens, his eyes are narrowed, a teasing thing, something silly he allows because they can laugh it off later at how both tried to impress the other when neither had to.

And slowly, deliberately, slides his boxers off his hips.

He has Hannibal's attention, for every motion, even as the man has his own pants halfway to his knees. His mouth turns up at the corner when he realizes he's caught staring, and he

finishes with his own, kicks them aside and stands straight to appreciate what he's given - and Will is straight and slim. He isn't delicate, but strong clean lines.

Hannibal reaches, crosses the space and finally pulls Will against him, skin on skin from shoulders almost to shins, and he doesn't seem to have anything to say. He's just - in a rush, for once. He pulls Will's mouth against his, hands curled high against his back, and pulls him along, until they can settle backward onto the bed.

Will settles above him, sitting up over Hannibal's thighs, and Hannibal just looks up appreciatively, works his hands over the soft skin of Will's stomach, up his sides, as the other explores him too, takes his time in a way that neither has really had a chance to before. He finds Will sensitive, responsive to his touch - though he's careful not to tickle. He runs his fingers over the insides of Will's thighs, finds the soft spaces behind the man's knees where he has to insinuate his fingers into the tight bends, and then the matching ones inside Will's elbows, where the veins run close to the skin in blue map lines.

He lifts one of Will's palms to his mouth, kisses gently against the palm, and then, just as he's tracing the tip of his tongue up the center of Will's two middle fingers, he curls his other hand around Will, the grip tight and familiar, but there's the duality of sensation as Hannibal works his mouth against Will's fingers at the same time, opening to admit the pads of Will's fingers against the velvet rough surface of Hannibal's tongue, which he moves in time with the slow, shallow strokes of his fist.

Will’s hands still for a moment, a quiet gasp of pleasure straightening his spine in a tense line before he relaxes, rolling his hips lightly into the grip against him. it’s intoxicating seeing Hannibal like this, aroused by him, entranced by him, and Will finds himself just as responsive, needing just as much to prove that he wants this, that he’s waited for it.

He still hasn’t answered Hannibal’s question on why he’s sorry.

He allows himself to show more vulnerability here, where there’s no chance or anyone walking in on them, no chance of their careful cover to be blown by the loss of attention. His eyes close and he moans, lips parted but teeth still gently pressed together. He carefully removes his fingers from Hannibal’s mouth and kisses him to make up for the loss, drawing his hand back and circling slick fingers around his hole before gently pushing in.

He wonders if Hannibal wanted to do it himself, and he’ll let him if he does, but for now Will rests above him, free hand curled in the sheets for balance as he keeps his lips just out of reach and pants gentle moans against Hannibal’s skin as he slowly stretches himself. It’s been a while, Will rarely jumps into a sexual relationship until there is a certain level of trust between them, until the chance of discovery is just as dangerous for both parties. With Hannibal, he has more trust than he has ever offered to someone else. They have saved each other in the field, kept each other up through the most painfully dull weeks on the job, played games, lost bets, drank horrible diner coffee at 3am on a Sunday…

He makes a helpless sound and kisses him again, pushing against Hannibal’s hand in a more desperate, needy way.

“Come on,” he urges, smiling, before kissing him again. they’re both tired, both running on the excitement and adrenaline of this, but neither will last long enough to drag this out for hours. If only, he supposes, if only…

Perhaps he has one more week before they find something incriminating. Perhaps just tomorrow.

Hannibal is almost hypnotized - Will is so close, and still pushing for it. Hannibal hadn't wanted to rush, but Will's right - they're both exhausted, at the end of their ropes. Maybe they could wake a little early in the morning, and risk showing up faintly dishevelled - but then again, maybe not.

"I know," he assures Will, kisses him again and then gets up on his elbows to dig through the bedside table, rummaging in the drawer until he comes up with a jar of Vaseline, which spreads thick and slow on his fingers, promising an ease of slide, but instead of moving Will out of the way he lines their fingers up together so they can both work him open and slick.

It's still at Will's pace, as it always has been - and Will claims the jar to slick Hannibal's cock up in turn, as Hannibal works his thumb over the head of Will's cock, then just beneath, along the frenulum, until Will mirrors the motion roughly on him, and he hisses out a breath at the gentle warning and huffs out a chuckle after.

He curls his hands up against Will's shoulders as the other leans over him, and he leans up to kiss him as Will guides Hannibal against him, and then begins to sink down. Hannibal's nails leave soft imprints in Will's shoulders then, and he pulls the man closer still. His voice comes free of him in low, needy sounds that might have been embarrassing if both of them hadn't already been waiting so long for this, and it's beyond worth it.

Will is already starting to move, but Hannibal slides his hands down from the man's shoulders and grips his hips, pulls him down all the way, hips against hips, and holds him there for a moment, so he can feel how they fit together. It won't last long when they start moving in earnest, he knows, but if they can't take it slow, he can at least take enough time to feel this.

There's a lot Hannibal could say, but he doesn't - he tries to convey through his grip, through the way their eyes meet - how grateful he is, not just for this moment but all of them, and then Will bites him lightly in impatience, and Hannibal lets him go, and his quiet chuckle turns into a pleasured groan.

And it’s slow here too, a careful pace, but one that keeps them so close. Will can feel every sound as it vibrates through Hannibal’s chest, can feel every breath against him, and the angle is perfect, hitting just the right place in a way that makes Will want to curl in on himself to hide how good it feels. But he stretches forward instead.

“Nnnng worth it, so worth it…” he breathes, pressing back with another moan before biting his lip and drawing his hands through Hannibal’s hair. He tilts his head back and kisses his throat, down to his collarbone to bite there, just lightly, not enough to mark but enough to remember. Then he retraces the motion, draws lips gentle over the hammering pulse, feeling how alive the man under him was.

It’s almost a shame.

Again, Will wonders if it’s worth the risk to try hold out the week, just to have this. He’d like to.

He curls one leg further around Hannibal’s, draws his hands to wrap around his shoulders and shifts his weight to roll them so he’s on his back, the change of angle drawing pleased gasp from him before Will arches, one leg still drawn up over Hannibal’s hip, the other stretched out against the bed.

Hannibal gets his hands onto Will's waist as the other shifts them, to help keep him steady as they go. They resettle against the bed, and Hannibal presses his palms flat to the mattress and moves shallowly, with a soft, surprised noise at just how good it is.

"Worth the wait?" he asks, and exhales a breath, pushes a little harder on the next thrust and then shifts again, reaches to get a hand under Will to arch his back just so. "You could have come up any time."

It's not an accusation but a question - if he'd wanted this, if they'd both wanted this the way they obviously did, why had Will put it off so long? Maybe for this moment to really be worth something. The display of patience in that case is charming, even as Hannibal pulls them into an angle where he can push against Will's prostate.

The first surprised cries from deep in Will's chest are utterly worth it. Hannibal arches his back so he can lean down from the shoulders and keep the same angle, and settle his own mouth just behind Will's ear, so they can both hear the sounds the other makes in their pleasure - he thinks this memory will keep him company for a while, if Will himself won't. This moment of closeness shared, with neither having to look over their shoulders for once.

Will doesn’t answer him. there’s no point because he won’t understand, few people would. I waited to see if you were worthy, if you would come close when no one else had, and you did and now I’m here. He concentrates instead on showing Hannibal that he’s happy here, now, that he wants this and that his responses are far from an act.

He arches a little harder, breathing out a gentle curse before loosing his voice in another low sound of pleasure. His hands drag through Hannibal’s hair, down his back, against his sides, and it’s so tight and perfect and the knowledge that it’s now, for a reason, the patience dictated by something else, almost hurts.

“I was stupid,” he breathes instead, pulling Hannibal down to kiss him again, open-mouthed and deep and filled with a sort of longing he can’t find a way to satisfy. “But I’m here.”

"Never," Hannibal tells him. Maybe Will was careful, in his own way, maybe just as worried about starting something serious as Hannibal was. The problem was they were already serious, perhaps without ever intending it. "You're here," he agrees, and he wouldn't change this moment even in time.

Will wonders if Hannibal will believe it. If he’ll take the accusation at face value, if he’ll sit Will down like a man, like his partner, and ask him outright and listen to his answer. And

when he knows, when there’s no doubt, he wonders if Hannibal will understand that too, that it was done for him, because no one else would be able to find him, understand him, enjoy him the way Hannibal had.

He supposes by that point it doesn’t matter.

He moans, a high weak sound, and parts his lips on quick breaths. He’s very close and he almost hates the rush but he can’t avoid it.

Hannibal's mouth is open, his breath warm. He can hold them for a few moments more, perhaps, back from the edge, but he doesn't. Hannibal splits the difference, figuring they've been patient this long, in a way, and he curls his fist around Will's cock to help him the rest of the way over the edge. Hannibal doesn't hold himself back from easing over first, though it comes on him slow and comfortable, and Will comes moments after, his body going tense with it.

Turning his head, Hannibal captures Will's cry with his mouth, eases him through it before he lets his own haze overtake him fully, and then grips him closer still for a long moment - holding what he has, while he has it.

Afterward, it’s easier than it might have been - they know each other, they're comfortable anyway, this is just another step further. But Hannibal is tired - spent in more ways than one, though for now his mind is far away from the case, the day's worries forgotten as he settles to one side of Will, reaches out to pull him close against him. It was dangerous already, but now he wasn't wholly certain how he'd keep his hands off of his partner at work, in moments that are barely out of the public eye.

It feels harder in this specific moment. So he doesn't bother, he just curls his hands around Will's middle and keeps him close, and he feels good, but tired. "Do you want to try and shower now," he asks, casting a hand back to try and get the blankets over them. "Or leave it for the morning?"

Will hums and settles back against Hannibal, feeling his warmth against his back, from the arms encircling him. he’s sore, in the most perfect way, and tired. His body slowly shutting down for the night. He knows he’ll wake early, he’s trained his body into it. he’ll be up before first light regardless of when he closed his eyes. he snuggles back against the warmth behind him and wraps one arm on top of Hannibal’s around him.

“Mmm we can shower in the morning I think.”

Hannibal hesitates, on the point of pressing further - he'd never really asked Will, and it was dangerous enough that he knew they had to be careful, but he wants this... more often. Maybe not all the time, maybe not even commonly, but every so often it'd be nice to know there was this for them. When he finally makes up his mind, his voice emerges as a low, tired murmur.

"I'm due for vacation time the end of this year," Hannibal suggests, very carefully. "We could rent a cabin..."

Will's barely awake, warm and sated and comfortable, but he hears him. Lets the comment sit a while, because it seems to take a lot longer than usual to get his thoughts to translate to words.

"I think Yellowstone would be beautiful in winter." He murmurs finally, sighing contentedly and letting sleep take him under.

-

It's still dark when Will wakes up. Hannibal is pressed against him close, as close as they had fallen asleep, with his forehead resting on Will's shoulder, arms around him, one leg between Will's in a comfortable tangle. Will gently slides one hand out from under the covers and splays his fingers, lets them cool in the early morning before retracting them again.

It's so quiet here, nothing like his apartment, and yet he'd slept like the dead. He almost cringes at the crude metaphor. Will doesn't know how light or heavy a sleeper Hannibal is, doesn't know if turning in his arms will wake him, if climbing out of bed will. For the moment he rests in the warm embrace and savors it.

He closes his eyes, remembers the way Hannibal's lips had felt against his own, frantic then gentle, soft and addictive, how his hands had pulled him closer, pressed against his skin, splayed over it, drew rough palms over his shoulders and down to bend his back in the way he wanted. Remembers how it had felt to have him push in, how he'd held Will carefully, like he was something fragile, something perfect that he refused to damage. He remembers how amazing it had felt to cry out under him with absolute abandon, how soft the nuzzles were against his throat, at the back of his neck when they had fallen into a soft and sweaty pile together after.

He remembers and opens his eyes reluctantly.

Hannibal doesn't wake when Will turns to face him. Perhaps he'd been far more tired than he'd shown, but the most he does is frown slightly before settling into the new position comfortably, eyes still moving under his lids. Will watches him, ghosts the backs of his fingers over his hair and down his jaw, draws the pad of his thumb over his lips before leaning in to kiss him again, soft enough to keep him in his dreams, but enough for the ghost of sensation to linger against Will's mouth.

Then he slides out of bed and goes to take a shower.

When he returns, Hannibal has moved, enough to suggest he'd woken to find himself alone, gotten up to investigate, and found Will still here. He's dozing, now, rather than sleeping, and Will takes a moment to appreciate the soft and sleepy form before walking over to nuzzle him awake.

"Take a shower," he prompts, kissing Hannibal before the man can reply, "I'll make breakfast."

He allows himself to be pulled back into bed for a moment, catching himself on the edge and kissing Hannibal back with a smile. He could get used to this, very quickly. eventually he

pulls away, extricating himself from warm hands and quiet sounds, and moves to find his clothes, hearing Hannibal stretch behind him pleasurably before walking to the bathroom to shower too.

When he's dressed, Will goes to the kitchen, finds the coffee pot where Hannibal had left it, the coffee very cold but still drinkable, and sets it on the stove to warm. He sets two pieces of bread into the toaster, rummages in the fridge for something to put on top. He slices tomato and cheese, arranges the ham on top, and then rests against the counter, his back to the bedroom, idly wiping the blade with a towel as he waits.

And waits. And waits.

And So It Goes

Chapter Summary

He wonders if he's allowed to blame Hannibal, for falling so fast, for making it mean more than it should have. He had and it does. Will sighs, doesn't linger.

Entirely blame Max for this. This was my headcanon when we wrote this and now he made me write it. So all anger and pain direct at my lovely cognomen.

He's also the mastermind behind most of the fics you guys all love, so send him love tenfold as well.

Chapter Notes

Quote featured is by Andrea Gibson

When Will wakes, it's still too early, his body just not quite ready to grow used to a routine of waking up next to Hannibal. The man breathes slowly beside him, now, a heavy arm over Will's middle, his nose soft against the back of Will's neck.

In truth, he should be used to this. To the comfort and the gentleness of everything that they are, everything that that man offers for him to be. It would be simple, to close his eyes and let this play out. Adjust the evidence so he can never be caught, as he has not been until Hannibal had dug deeper, until Will had given him the nudge to try more and more and more.

He wonders if he's allowed to blame himself, here, for seducing his partner. Or if that's the easy way out. An application of a vestigial feeling he should experience but doesn't.

Guilt.

Worry.

Something that reaches beyond affection.

He has high doubts, truly, for the latter.

He wonders if he's allowed to blame Hannibal, for falling so fast, for making it mean more than it should have. He had and it does. Will sighs, doesn't linger.

As every morning the past week, he extricates himself from Hannibal's arms, smiles when they tighten around him, turns to kiss the lips that murmur for him to stay in bed a moment longer.

He takes a shower. Washes away the sweat and heat from the night before, and wonders if that's the last time he will feel it sluice from his skin.

-

"How is it," Hannibal comments, expertly twining more noodles with his chopsticks from the cheap paper container on his lap, "That we always end up watching Martin Kane?"

Will no longer attempts chopsticks, choosing, instead, to suffer the amused looks from his partner as he uses a fork, like most other people in the bureau. He shrugs, finishes his mouthful.

"Because you always wrangle me to stay the night on Thursdays." he reasons, turning to look over his shoulder, eyebrow raised as though he expects Hannibal to argue. The other never does. And it's the third week he's complained about the show.

In truth, it is a laughable thing, making a thoroughly boring position seem like the most adventurous endeavor. A film noir in a life that should be anything but. It's an easy distraction, and easy enough to distract from.

On the screen, Happy McMann offers Martin another choice of tobacco, *something new*, he promises, *something you've never tried before*. Will highly doubts it. Doubts anything on the show isn't sponsored by the United States Tobacco Company. He wonders, absently, if in the time of Sherlock Holmes the stuff tasted better, or if they didn't know any better to complain.

Idly he wonders about taking up smoking again.

His food gets set on the side table, unfinished. Hannibal will eat it in the morning, cold, if Will isn't fast enough to stop him. It's a habit of his he finds utterly inexplicable, something he is both disgusted and utterly intrigued by.

At the next swell of music, Will turns away, settles himself with ease across Hannibal's thighs, accepting the chopstickful of dinner with careful teeth and a slow folding of lips. As he chews, Hannibal sets it away, glad the television is always set to a low volume to not have to crawl away from Will to adjust it.

The flickering black and white is the only light in the room and it's all they need. Will knows the man by heart, every sharp jut of bone, every tilt of his smile. He knows that Hannibal can navigate him in the dark, that his clever fingers will always find the spot against his stomach that makes Will squirm pleasantly, press closer and feel Hannibal's hand slide lower in reward.

"Friday is a designated late start." Hannibal reminds him, as though to justify his reasons for wanting Will in his home with him. More and more frequently, as the weeks wear on.

“For you.” Will reminds him in turn, but he doesn’t show any retaliation when the man leans closer to bring his nose gently against Will’s throat, a soft, intimate gesture, before his lips follow.

“Then consider me selfish.”

Will just smiles, runs his hands through Hannibal’s hair and kisses him when he lifts his head.

Consider who selfish? He wonders, hands moving to frame Hannibal’s face instead as he presses the other back into the pillows.

Perhaps they’re both selfish.

In the morning, Will catches the train.

Hannibal drives the Ford to the lot alone.

-

“Is it even worth going through the rest of the files?” Hannibal asks, resting his face in his hands folded on his desk. It’s 9pm. They’re alone in the office.

“They all show the same pattern, the same subtle implication at a vigilante killing. Isn’t that enough?”

“It never is for Jack.” Will reminds him, twirling his pen between his fingers, staring out the window at the night time city. It’s cold tonight. He knows Hannibal will ask him to stay, regardless of it being a Tuesday. He knows he’ll say yes, regardless of having no new shirt to change into for the morning.

He would start bringing them with him if it didn’t feel so permanent. So domestic.

“If we want to implicate one of our own, we need all the evidence that exists, and some that isn’t there, to even get Jack to listen.”

Hannibal grunts his reply, a reluctant agreement.

“I just wish we could get it sooner,” he murmurs, turning his head to look out the window as well, unaware of Will’s eyes on him. “Get him behind bars. Make it end. Go to Yellowstone.”

Will swallows, wonders if the feeling crawling up his throat is guilt or exhaustion and doesn’t linger on it.

“Sooner won’t always mean better,” he says softly, a plea for Hannibal to reconsider without explaining why. The other just sighs, turns his head against his arms in a gently exhausted gesture and Will looks away.

“Let’s go home.”

They don’t even manage dinner when they get to Hannibal’s. Just a gentle routine of undressing, one helping the other, before falling into bed and curling up in a cocoon of warmth together.

Will doesn’t sleep for a long time, and still wakes earlier than Hannibal does.

That morning he takes the car in.

Hannibal catches the train.

-

The night Will gives Hannibal the final files, the ones with the most evidence that he had kept himself, he lets Hannibal make love to him on the couch.

Both are tired, pleased, a little drunk from celebrating, in advance, the presenting of their evidence to Jack the following morning.

It’s intimate, Will’s entire body wrapped around Hannibal’s, feeling every inch of him as the other drives and pushes and holds Will still to bring him the most pleasure. They know each other so well, now, have cataloged every sound and slight shift in expression, know just how far to push.

Will doesn’t hold his voice, arches back with soft whines and whimpers of pleasure. Goes when Hannibal sits up and pulls Will into his lap, rocking their hips together for the sensation alone. They’re so close, here, just breaths between them.

If you were to press your heart close up against somebody else’s heart, eventually your hearts will start beating at the same time.

Will traces his lips with soft fingers, draws cool knuckles down Hannibal’s spine when the other bends close to him, to taste his heartbeat, to devour him this way. Will hopes this is the one Hannibal remembers, the night his mind jumps to when he needs it most.

They lay languid together, until the very early hours, before Will rouses Hannibal to join him in bed.

-

When Hannibal wakes, it’s to the discomfort of one of his hands falling to pins and needles.

A steady pressure rests against his stomach, and where he usually would draw his hands up, curl them over Will’s warm shoulders where he sits, today he finds them pinned at his sides by the younger man’s knees heavy against them.

He blinks, parts his lips to speak, and feels a cool, thin line against his throat that is unmistakable.

With a swallow, his brows draw together in gentle question.

Will doesn't move. After a moment he parts his lips with the tip of his tongue.

"You got close," he says softly, "December last year. It was the sloppy crime scene, where we found the boot print and fibres against the wall."

His voice is low, the tone he uses when he whispers to Hannibal at night, soft promises and plans for the future as their fingers tangle in soft laxity between them.

"The hunt seized you then and never let go and I knew it never would but…" he frowns, shakes his head, brows furrowed in something like pain. "You want it so soon, Hannibal. You wanted to catch him so quickly."

Hannibal makes a sound, opens his mouth to speak and Will sits back, blade pressing harder, though his expression doesn't change.

"I was so bored," he says, "So bored with this town, this life… I'd thought moving here from New Orleans would make it better, would bring up smart men and a chase to quicken my heart but I got nothing. I had *nothing* for months until I saw you."

His lips press close, press together, he shifts his weight to keep Hannibal's hands pinned, keeps the knife just on the side of pain that doesn't yet draw blood.

He won't make him suffer.

But he has to know, he has to understand.

"You are the only one who was allowed to know me, to see me, and you saw through me and saw something else."

Will shakes his head again, leans in, free hand up to stroke Hannibal's hair as the other follows him, unblinking, eyes wide.

"How did you see this, in me, Hannibal? When I had no idea it was there?" he asks, harshly, "How did you see this man in me, capable of gentleness, of connection? Of showtunes in the office and take out for breakfast, at your goading? How?"

He's smiling, though his eyes are filled with pain, bright in the early morning, more gray than blue.

"Hannibal -"

His voice catches, and Will's eyes close, for a moment, for an hour, it's hard to tell when life hangs on the edge of a blade against skin. He ducks his head against Hannibal's forehead, sighs.

"I have never been more proud to call a man a friend." he tells him honestly, "Nor prouder to have you as a partner as in this moment."

He pulls back, just enough to rest his nose against Hannibal's, to feel his breath stuttered and quick against his lips.

“Goodbye, Hannibal.”

His kiss steals any answer Hannibal is likely to give and Will draws the blade gently over the skin it rests on. The cut is precise, the blade sharp and merciful in its speed.

He doesn’t stop, doesn’t stop kissing him, doesn’t stop pressing them together as Hannibal shudders, as his body spasms in agony and fear, as his hands twist and try to push Will away, to save himself.

Will only pulls back when he needs to breathe, and the body beneath him doesn’t.

He rests a long time on top of Hannibal, forehead pressed to his, hand still in his hair, the other still pressing the bloody blade to the bed by his neck.

His heart has no beat to match, now, so it slows and settles on its own.

Will showers. Takes his time cleaning his hair and under his fingernails to clear away the blood. He dries in front of the mirror but doesn’t look at himself, doesn’t meet his eyes beyond the cursory look to check his face is clean of blood, but not of suffering.

He dresses quickly, the shirt from the night before, a tie from Hannibal’s closet.

He catches the train. Takes Hannibal’s designated late Friday start.

He doesn’t think about how Hannibal had breathed his name against Will’s lips before he’d kissed him, and how Will had apologised with the stroke of a blade.

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